



# **A WAR NEARBY**

by  
**Lope Vargas**

**An Analysis of Events  
in the Balkans**

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# INTRODUCTION

In “A War Nearby”, Lope Vargas examines the history of the Balkan region over the past century with an emphasis on the circumstances that led to the horrors of the past dozen years. One might wonder what interest these specific realities might have for us. In fact, these events graphically portray methods that the state uses to recuperate social struggle. As Vargas points out, the attempt of the Yugoslav federation to impose austerity measures demanded by the IMF in the mid-1980’s led to significant resistance among the exploited. Within the dominant ideology of the federation, ethnic nationalism based in the various republics that made up the federation played a significant role in the operations of power. While the federation was not capable of saving itself, the leaders of the various republics played on the fears roused by the collapse of a world, offering this ethnic nationalism as a stable point in a reeling world—the energy that might have gone into class struggle was twisted to the ends of the politicians of the competing republics with devastating results for the people of the region. This has given Western powers the opportunity to intervene in the name of humanity and impose their interests—and a military occupation that shows no signs of disappearing.

I have appended three other pieces to the pamphlet to provide more information and a bit of an update and a list of recommended readings to further an anarchist analysis of the situation.

# A WAR NEARBY

by  
Lope Vargas

In the years that followed the decomposition of the bureaucratic regimes of eastern Europe, several “eulogizers” of our civilization coined the description of the latest collective illusion to mark Western life. That description—and who remembers anything else?—was *the end of History*. Not just the victory of liberal capitalism over state capitalism, wrongly called communism, but the idea that a world definitively pacified, a world forgetful of past horrors, wars and massacres, would be born from this victory. A happy world, perhaps just a bit boring, the planetary advent of civilization after centuries of blood. This idea has experienced alternating destinies for some time, to the detriment of those few who still see the horror precisely in this civilization and those many who have seen the daily horror of civilization tattoo itself forever on their skin. While the more ingenuous among the parties interested in the maintenance of the world order slept tranquilly on *the end of History*, a not very small part of those who wanted to put history back in motion slept just as placidly. Most untimely descendents of positivism, the latter were still convinced at bottom of the inevitability of civil progress. One still had to struggle hard to change the world, but the opponent wasn’t as bloodthirsty as it once was: several insurmountable limits of correctness, if not humanity, had been set. And the worst beasts of the past, those hidden in the corner of the consciousness of every one of us—and not only in that of our adversary—promised not to reappear anymore. The exploiters, civil; the exploited, irreproachable. But a single word was sufficient to mark the funeral rites of these two brief modern illusions. Try saying “Bosnia”, and everything that one believed to be buried forever reappears beyond the hedge of our gardens. Bosnia is the measure of how much blood capital demands, while it tells us again what we did not want to know: whether History advances or has stopped, we still live on the edge of horror.

## HOW FAR IS YUGOSLAVIA?

As was predictable, after Bosnia, Kosovo followed, and maybe after Kosovo, Macedonia will follow, in a tight sequence of massacres that will make us wring our hands. From Sarajevo on, those who have been responsible for the Yugoslav carnage have sought to hide their role in the events; time after time, they have unloaded all guilt on the bloodthirsty Balkan commanders, and now they have successfully defined the NATO bombing as humanitarian intervention. On the other hand however, everyone has sought a safe port against the storm of their conscience, and all this shouting of “No to the war!” until one is exhausted has only served to hide powerlessness in the face of such frighteningly close and incomprehensible events. In search of any certainty, so many have given heed to the orphans of Viet Nam and Nicaragua, that they came to depict the Serbs as a small nation under attack, determined to defend what is left of socialism with gun in hand. From this one gets the unrepresentable anti-imperialist slogans on the walls and the posthumous elegies to Tito. Others have invoked diplomacy and politics, that is to say, war by other means. Still others have thought to escape from the horrors by taking refuge in the churches to pray to the god in whose name the worst misdeeds have been committed. These positions are not only the fruit of the fertile encounter between stalinism and christianity; they are ways like others of keeping Yugoslavia distant from our homes.

From the moment it began, our paid interpreters and commentators on international politics have been revealing the particular reasons for the latest Yugoslav war and for the western intervention. The elements of the conflict—geopolitical and economic—have been patiently enumerated. No one has been forced by counter-information to uncover hidden and decisive truth. Everything is said about this war except the essential, that which no further list of data can succeed in telling us. If we want to try to achieve an understanding of the gangrene spreading throughout the Balkans in recent years, we should not lose sight of the social question: the history, on the one hand, of those who try to accumulate wealth and power without many scruples and,

on the other hand, those who suffer conditions of life that are imposed on them and at times try to rebel. The recent history of Yugoslavia creates a new awareness. The clash that is born from social division does not necessarily lead toward new and free worlds. Neither through the superimposition of small changes which mold reality little by little in the image of our dreams nor through the accumulation of the conditions that will determine a definitive future explosion of the reality that displeases us. The unfolding of this clash can only provoke those social breaks in which everything finally becomes possible. And this everything includes freedom, but also the worst of oppressions. It is only in light of the social question that the ensemble of data that they have spewed in our face about the current Balkan war can assume a certain, frightening, coherence. If there is social division here as there is in Yugoslavia; if the specific forms that the social struggle has assumed in Yugoslavia was determined largely by necessities ripened in our West—then we are already at war...yes, we, as well. And if this is not enough for us, we would do well to be aware that nothing guarantees that the mechanisms that drive so many Yugoslav exploited to participate in this horror could not appear tomorrow precisely in the heart of our civilized world. Now, Yugoslavia is not so far away.

## **THE BALKANS ON A CARD**

Heading in the opposite direction to that taken by Theseus, in the end, we follow the thread of social struggle to the center of the Balkan labyrinth in order to get to know the Minotaur. Outside the labyrinth is the Europe of the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the totality of interests that outlined the present border of Albania in 1912 and led to the organization of the territorial power that would take the name of Yugoslavia around the Serbian state at the end of the first world war.

The Balkans never underwent that long historical process characteristic of western Europe through which the borders of different kingdoms came to approximately coincide with the idea of as many nations. The very idea of a national state only appeared a short time ago in this peninsula, which had been subdivided between the Hapsburg and Ottoman empires until

recently. Thus, the territory of the old Yugoslav federation was actually the area in the Balkans where several different populations mingled in the era of the great empires. Macedonians, Bulgarians, Albanians, Croatians, Serbians and others populated this region without giving it any national homogeneity. Just as the Italian Renaissance carried in itself the prospects for the social changes that rendered it possible, so the struggle of the Balkan populations against Austrian and Turkish domination had social characteristics. But not solely. If in western Europe the concept of the nation now rests on the continuity of a power over a given territory, in the Balkans the mythological element prevails: the darkness of foreign domination and suffering followed a supposed “age of gold”, giving a mystical, almost messianic, significance to the redemption of each ethnicity. Every single national mythology has survived the collapse of two great Empires, being exalted or repressed from time to time according to the interests of different western powers that have sought to control the region.

The Albanian national identity experienced a formidable thrust beginning in 1910—when the Italian and Austrian chancelleries began to construct an Albanian state under their protection in order guarantee their hegemony over the Adriatic. It reached its peak with the annexation of Kosovo, Ciamaria and some Bulgarian territories—the great Albania—under the guidance of the fascists of Galeazzo Ciano.

The Yugoslav political borders, like those of much of eastern Europe, have the particularity of not having been outlined as a consequence of conflicts between the different states that compose the Balkans, but rather of being imposed according to the power relations between the victors of the two world wars. Thus, these borders express the successive balances between various powers and are meaningful only as long as these balances last. The foundation of Yugoslavia does not spring directly from the demands made along these lines by different minority strata of the Slav populations of the Balkans—demands that were expressed in the efforts to give body to a Serbo-Croatian literary language among other things. Above all, it responds to two vital needs of the victors of the first world war. First, that of creating a sufficiently solid state around the Serb

realm by adding the Slav regions confiscated from the Austro-Hungarian Empire to it in order to make it into a barrier to German expansionism toward the Mediterranean. And, equally important, that of insuring an allied military presence in the heart of the Balkans that would be in a position to give some stability to the entire region. These same strategic options were retained at the end of the second world war with the supplementary guarantee of a prospect for internal stability that was much more convincing than in the past, thanks to the federal organization of the new state. Besides, for the first time in the brief history of Yugoslavia, a real and powerful popular outburst identified its interests with those of the state. To the nationalist mythologies already present in the area, an artificial one was added—that of Yugoslavia. If the previous mythologies brought their force to past struggles against the Turks and the Austrians, this new one caused the populations to participate together in a single national consciousness through the founding myth of resistance to fascism and the war of liberation from the Germans, creating a patriotic ideology that had not existed until that time.

## **IMAGES FROM THE LABYRINTH**

Here we are then before the entrance of a labyrinth in which the paths of the social clash and those of nationalism run parallel. Hundreds of years of suffering for the exploited of the Balkans are re-elaborated in favor of the ruling classes who present themselves as heirs of the heroes of past struggles, under the watchful eyes of the western chancelleries and the Comintern. Nationalist discourse is used permanently in Albania like it is in Yugoslavia in order to maintain a minimal level of social cohesion, and as soon as any turbulence appears on the horizon, the ethnic myths are expanded to the point of exasperation. The regime of Enver Hoxha, more backward and less flexible than that of Tito, would come to build a good part of its stability on a permanent anti-Yugoslav and anti-Greek mobilization. Hoxha re-elaborates and updates the traditional Albanian codes; he presents himself as continuing the work of Scanderbeg, “father of the fatherland” of Albania, and tries to substitute the cult of “Albaniety” for the three religions present in the territory—



orthodoxy, catholicism and islam. The supposed ethnic primacy of the Albanians as the only people in a position to establish communism is combined with the myth of proletarian internationalism. Even the vicissitudes of international politics are read through the filter of an ethnic standard. For example, the break with Moscow after Stalin's death is explained in terms of the character of the Slavic people who supposedly lean intrinsically toward despotism and barbarism. Then, after the break between Tito and Hoxha in 1948, the heart of the nationalist discourse becomes the "liberation" of Kosovo where the Albanian population has to live together with Slavs who are inevitably barbarians.

If the Albanian bureaucracy entrusted its stability to this ceaseless cultural and ideological nationalist production—as well as fierce repression and a few social concessions—for forty years, the bureaucracy that ruled Yugoslavia would combine a federalist discourse with the nationalist one.

The "miracle" of Tito, praised so highly by the stalinists of our day, consists of developing bureaucracies from ethnic foundations for every Yugoslav region in perpetual rivalry among themselves and in presenting himself as the only figure in a position to make them live together. Behind the official federalist ideology derived from the Resistance, the ensemble of national particularisms has been meticulously cultivated and the very threat of nationalist explosion used as an element of stability by the regime. Few political regimes in the world can boast of an attention to the question of "cultural liberties" and "respect for minorities" equal to that of the Yugoslav regime. All of the ethnicities present in Yugoslavia received instruction in their own language, read their own newspapers and watched their own television channels. All official documents were translated into the main languages. In this way, the national problem became an integral part of the mode of social division and management of the Yugoslav system. However, the technique of fomenting nationalisms in order to strengthen the Federation could not be applied in Kosovo. Since the idea of a Balkan federation that would have included the Albania of Hoxha was tabled by force of circumstances, granting Kosovo the status of a republic would have meant facilitating the

expansionist goals of Tirana. Thus, in flagrant contradiction with the official federalist ideology, Kosovo has remained a mere territory of Serbia for forty years. This choice found justification in the Serbian nationalist mythology that sees Albanians as traitors in the struggle against the Turks and Kosovo as the cradle of the nation. The concessions and revocations of autonomous status to Kosovo have, therefore, been conditioned on the varying necessity of Belgrade to blow on the nationalist fire in order to reunite the Serbian population.

Thus, while the Croatian, Slovenian and Serbian nationalist ideologies were supported more or less openly by the bureaucrats of the League of Yugoslav Communists, that of Kosovo was reinforced under the table in part by the government of Tirana. The Kosovo Liberation Army itself was born through the fusion of several old clandestine Enverist groups, and the entire history of Kosovar independence ideology becomes entwined with the designs for a great Albania advanced by still more recent Albanian governments, in particular that of Sali Berisha.

We advance into the labyrinth and already the presence of the Minotaur is impending. We will meet it shortly when class hatred reaches its peak and is exchanged much too quickly for its contrary, ethnic hatred, and when this precarious balance among the Balkan nationalist ideologies is dissolved. There is no precise turning point in this Balkan history of ours. A series of converging processes of a varying nature exists, causing explosions that in themselves could open the door to some new scenario.

## **THE COLLAPSE OF THE STATE**

During the 1980's the federal structure of the Yugoslavian state demonstrated that it was no longer in a position to control the social situation. The international organizations bound the granting of loans—without which the Yugoslav economy would suffocate—to the application of the prescription for reorganization formulated by the International Monetary Fund (IMF). But the attempts to restructure the heavy industrial sectors of the economy met with an ever-rising wave ever

resistance among the exploited, and long strikes followed one after another in all parts of the federation. Thus the Yugoslav bureaucracy began to lose all international credibility, because it was unable to efficiently reorganize the economy. In the face of this breakdown of the economic machinery, the interests of various bureaucratic factions suddenly came into competition, due to major imbalances existing in the industrial development of the federation. Slovenia and Croatia—both relatively industrialized and modern—opposed the more backwards republics of the south. The wealthier republics, at that time, were bound to the others by ties of obligatory solidarity that were realized through the financing of consistent federal funds.

Up to that time, as we have seen, the bureaucracy put forth a double discourse, superimposing the official cult of federalism and Yugoslav unity onto a constant call to national identity. At this point, however, the federalist discourse ceased to be useful or meaningful since, in order to survive, each republic had to renegotiate the bonds of solidarity that tied it to the others. In order to accomplish this, there was no alternative but nationalism to mobilize the population, convincing it that its troubles were caused by the rival republics. The discourse in fashion among the bureaucrats of each republic became, in summary: “Workers, we are with you and against the others!” Obviously, the Slovenian and Croatian bureaucrats added that the economic scarcities of this period were due to the excessive amount of federal funds confiscated by the backward Serbia. On the other hand, the Serbian bureaucrats tried to convince the exploited of their republic that all responsibility lay with the Croats and Slovenians.

These maneuvers are not new in Yugoslav history, but in the past they have never brought about decisive transformations, always being successful at reestablishing the social discipline necessary for making the economic machinery start again after a period of negotiation and a few reciprocal concessions. The ruling groups that managed this process during the ‘80’s did not realize quickly enough that international economic pressures left only a minimal margin for maneuvering in order to renegotiate a new internal balance. At a certain point, no one was able to concede anything any more. Besides, Tito had left a series of

decision making procedures as an inheritance that were sufficiently complex that they prevented each regional interest from imposing itself through institutional tools. Thus the struggles of the exploited were able to break each attempt to put the economy back in motion and the harmony of the federation was reduced to impotence.

## **THE EXPLOITED IN THE DESERT**

Throughout the 1980's, the discourse on which the Yugoslavian bureaucracies based their power progressively lost credibility.

As we have seen, the system of values that held the country together was crushed by its own contradictions. The unitary mythology born from the Resistance crumbled under the renewed weight of nationalist propagandas, and its official heir, the armed forces, lined up openly behind the Serbian faction of the central power. Attempts at economic restructuring placed those few "securities" that had been offered to the exploited during the last forty years into crisis, goading them into struggle. One is not dealing with a mere social or economic involution; an entire world is collapsing.

Thus, social tension continues to grow, but those who are struggling no longer has anything to which to cling. The memory of the façade of "proletarian internationalism" imposed by the bureaucrats for forty years stands in the way of the idea that the exploited of different nationalities could achieve solidarity among themselves against the common masters. It is the very awareness that common masters exist that is weak. The enemy is not located with clarity.

In this situation the use of nationalism assumes a new importance. Embellishing the interests of every faction of the Yugoslavian bureaucracy with those of past history, all the sleeping grudges of Balkan history are awakened. The exploited much too consistently react to the collapse of the certainties of the past by clinging to the last of these, nationalist propaganda, rediscovering values to share and masters to obey; discovering a community and a history of which they can feel a part and for

which they can spend the enormous energies accumulated over so many years.

During these same years, a process similar to the one in Yugoslavia was set in motion in Albania. Here we can see the moves that were able to influence the situation in Kosovo that is so very interesting in this sense.

With the death of Enver Hoxha, the Albanian leaders found themselves facing a series of thorny problems. Since the time of the rupture with Beijing, the country lived in almost absolute isolation. As we have seen this isolation found a justification in Albanian particularism, but with the passing of years it finally led to the irreversible freezing of the entire industrial apparatus. The enormous installations that were imported first from the Soviet Union and then from China—already obsolete due to a lack of maintenance and spare parts—spin uselessly. Inside the factories, the workers continue to work in order to produce nothing, and the regime cannot afford dismissal, because one of its boasts is still that of full employment. In order to survive, the only passable road that presents itself to Ramiz Alia, Hoxha's protégé is to place industrial restructuring together with a complete turnaround in relations with foreign powers. For a certain period, Albanian propaganda has to tune down the nationalistic melodies in order to be able to reopen relations with bordering nations, particularly with Serbia.

Thus, in the second half of the 1980's, the Kosovar problem, around which the Albanian collective identity had been constructed, suddenly became a mere internal Yugoslav question. Meanwhile, the prospects of economic liberalization opened by the Alia regime caused the enmity toward the west to collapse in the Albanian imaginary. Hoxha's heir himself is, thus, the one to undermine the ideological basis of a regime that until then had tried to construct its identity completely in the negative, claiming to be surrounded by Slav "barbarism" on the one side and western "immorality" on the other.

In a matter of a few years, the Albanian exploited find themselves in a vast desert. No economic securities—not even the miseries of the past—no collective values exist to reassure them anymore; the only *time* they can still comprehend is that of the Kanan, the codes of the ancient clannish structures.

Insurrections without leaders or demands follow one after the other, culminating in the uprising of 1997 and the subsequent western intervention that returned Albania to its old status as an Italian protectorate. The person who succeeded in controlling the situation for a short time before the arrival of the Italian military was Hoxha's former doctor, Sali Berisha.

His government, which was swept away by the insurrection of 1997, rebuilt a system of strong values for the Albanians, reelaborating those of the past in positive and in negative, blending Kanan, nationalism, vicious economic liberalization and violent "anti-communism". This is how the "liberation" of the Kosovar cousins would become a national problem, how a good part of the arms pillaged from the barracks during the insurrection would end up in the hands of the KLA and how the north of Albania would be transformed into the logistic base for anti-Serbian independence guerrillas.

And here we are, at last, at the center of the labyrinth. On the one hand, we have the unknown, all the immense possibilities opened by a situation in which no certainties or values suffocate the exploited anymore, in which an entire world seems to need just one last push to collapse. On the other hand, there is the Minotaur bellowing from its throat. It is a monster that the world has known much too well, which is called ethnic war in the Balkans today. For capital, first the threat of war and later war itself are emergency tools for reestablishing social peace. When it can no longer produce any certainties, all that is left for it to do is ride some Minotaur. It's not a matter of returning to a past that was worse, as we may have believed. The new Balkan wars are a sign of modernity. This friendship between capital and the monster is not a great discovery. And us? We try to keep quiet for a moment, to act in such a way that the words that may possibly have been with us for our entire life do not continue to delude us. No peaceful and orderly revolution announces itself on the horizon, no sun of the future rising; when all the checks collapse, when collective myths and certainties have no more place in the heart of the exploited, when accumulated rancor explodes, nothing can be guaranteed anymore. And this can only frighten us, timid civilized beings that we are. Perhaps we are more fearful of that lack of guarantees than of the Minotaur. So

then, which do we, ourselves, choose? When Yugoslavia arrives on our shores, are we really certain that we will face this fear at last, or will we, like the Yugoslavs, find the terrible embrace of the Minotaur in the passageway sweet?

## **THE FLOOD**

The river of social struggle, that of the bankruptcy of two states and that of the collapse of every value have already mixed their waters. Only one stream is missing in order for these rivers to merge and transform this flood into a bloodbath; it will arrive from the West.

The crisis of the Yugoslav state in the 1980's coincided with the necessity of rearranging the European balance. The existence of Yugoslavia itself no longer responded to the interests of the powers that had favored its constitution. German expansionism toward the Mediterranean, now being carried out in the context of the united Europe, no longer needs to be blocked. The federal system shows itself to be unable to guarantee the functioning of Yugoslav commerce any more and runs the risk of social explosion much too close to the tranquil western shores. Necessarily, the European Economic Community (EEC) has to promote the creation of new state entities that could replace the now useless Federation, marking the passage that opened from the internal Yugoslav crisis—a crisis studded with threats, repression and police extortion—to the military crisis. Up until a few weeks before Slovenia's declaration of independence, in fact, the threat of secession was considered an extreme means of pressure more than a real possibility in the nationalist game of prominence carried out by the Yugoslav bureaucracy. But the guarantee to recognize this new state—agreed to more or less discreetly by the EEC—permitted the military solution and, in the end, imposed it. At that time, the European union seized the occasion to officially confirm that the union of Slovenia and Croatia into one state in order to control German expansion toward the Mediterranean was historically superceded, granting to Germany what it had not been able to conquer in two world wars.

The behavior adopted by the “Community of Nations” during the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia is understood starting from the coherence of its actions and not as a function of the contradictory positions put forth in order to serve as a screen. Contrary to the claims of those who try to lend credence to the crocodile tears spilled regularly in public, this behavior is quite far from lacking objectives. The military drift that followed from Slovenia’s declaration of independence and still continues today was inevitable from the perspective of Western power since, with the exception of Slovenia, there are no borders that can be determined on a national basis. Therefore, it is impossible to build a new state without resorting to ethnic cleansing, and it was this international strategy that actually outlined the necessity for it. The images of this flood are today’s history.

All the evidence for this Western strategy can be found in the case of Bosnia. Ever since the first Vance-Owen plan, the pseudo-response to the Bosnian crisis has not been based on the historical reality of this region, but on an ideological reality created artificially by the clash of bureaucratic interests. This is how the partition of this territory between the three nationalist currents that have blown it to bits was determined. The reorganization of Bosnia hides the double objective of the division of the zones of influence in the former Yugoslavia and the reorganization of the Balkans. The policy of the great powers favored the deportation of populations which served to reduce the breadth of the social contradictions that the new regional powers would have had to face and, thus, the risks of the extension of the Balkan conflict beyond the borders of the former Yugoslavia. There is not a chance that the great powers would have been accused of openly of favoring the Serbian armed forces in besieged Sarajevo. The only real efforts of the West at this time were those of secret diplomacy, pledged to mitigate the tensions between Serbia, Macedonia and their five neighbors (Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Greece and Albania) at all costs.

From this point on, all the international initiatives would ineptly pursue three objectives, independently of the internal contradictions of the West. First, they would organize a security zone between the former Yugoslavia and the borders of Western



Europe. This role of buffer-state is assigned to Slovenia, the internal conditions of which lend themselves perfectly to this function: it is an industrialized and westernized region that is ethnically coherent and small enough that the volume of investment necessary for maintaining its stability is relatively modest. The other two objectives are verified by the effort to subdivide Yugoslavia around two entities that seem to have the broad shoulders necessary for this task. Control of the Adriatic coast and the Adriatic-European axis is entrusted to Croatia, control of the Balkans to Serbia.

With the Bosnian problem temporarily suppressed, it was possible to contain that of Macedonia, repress those of Vojvodina and Montenegro and militarily liquidate the problem of Krajina during these years. If Croatia was able to keep its promises to the West, this was not possible for Serbia as was made clear in the past few years. The original point of explosion in the old Yugoslav federalist ideology has come back on the scene with all its drama, revealing how poorly considered the Western choice to entrust the control of the Balkans to Milosevic was. The latest war, which saw the entire West engaged against Serbia, pursued the objective of pushing out an old ally who proved to be completely untrustworthy, while still attempting to preserve the territorial integrity of the country in order to avoid extending the conflict to the neighboring regions: Albania, Macedonia, Bulgaria and Greece. Up to now no one has actually recognized the right of the Kosovar Albanians to self-determination, and the Rambouillet accords have indicated the mere autonomy of this region as the only feasible solution. The West used the two factions of the Kosovar independence movement, Rugova's group and the KLA, in turn in anti-Serb functions without ever underwriting their more or less obvious political project of the great Albania. The Kosovar population itself was used as a logistical element in the conflict.

The only significant about-face in Western strategy that distinguished this latest war was the desire to no longer delegate control of the Balkans to anyone. For now, the armies of NATO will manage it directly until new, capable and reliable allies can be found in Belgrade or elsewhere.

## THE FAILED SOCIAL TEMPEST

Crossroads for a thousand different civilizations, the Balkans possess an enormous cultural wealth, traditions that come together and mix. This is one of the reasons for their instability. They present a field for maneuvering favorable to the promotion of greedy politicians, but as the history of the last hundred years shows, they or simply an insoluble puzzle for every state that wants to assert its power here. The economic, social and cultural processes experienced in Yugoslavia and Albania over the last twenty years are common, to a lesser degree, to all parts of the Balkans and to that immense and desolate land that is today's Russia.

In the Balkans, the Minotaur has been called ethnic war. In the Arab world, its strict parent gallops, the religious integralism that has found its best pastures in Algeria. But this does not mark a return to the past with its murmuring; it was ridden in on a form most modern—that of capital. And when our turn comes, what will our Minotaur be?

Cruel smirk of history, the monster has always taken root in the speech of the exploited—whom it transforms into executioners—while the exploiters merely use it as an approved political weapon with an awareness that is more terrifying than the slaughters themselves. A correspondent of the BBC furnishes an eloquent example of this in his book, reporting a conversation between the Serbian general Mladic and the Croatian Minister of the Interior: agreeing on the return of the bodies of soldiers killed in the name of ethnic hatred that they themselves fomented, the two exchanged the most sincere wishes for their respective families. In the years to come, when they have found an acceptable balance, the representatives of the former Yugoslav bureaucracy will be good friends once more. On the other hand, the exploited will continue to hate each other, to feel the breath of the beast in the air. It is no longer a question of knowing whether History has come to an end or continues to march on. We must know how to read the questions that events raise even when they mix dreams and nightmares together. Meanwhile, the Yugoslav history of the past twenty years is the history of a failed social tempest, of a potential revolt that

mutated into a horrible gangrenous sore. It is the very energy that could have sustained the conflict opened between the exploited and the exploiters that has been kept busy on the worst war fronts. The protagonists of social struggle have become the laborers of the terror. Of course, sooner or later, the threads of social conflict will retie themselves, and ethnic hatred will cease to play the lead role in the Balkan tragedy. But from our side, how many will still have bloodstained hands? So goodbye forever to tranquil sleep.

## APPENDIXES

I am appending a few articles from other sources. The first, “Let’s Take Any Name”, explains some of the economic factors in play—particularly Italian interests which, along with those of Germany and Greece, are of great significance in the region. The second one, “The Nationalist Racket”, gives some of the history of the Kosovo Liberation Army. Both of these were translated from an Italian language one-shot paper, *Ne la loro Guerra, Ne la loro Pace* (Neither their war, nor their peace), which appeared in June 1999. The last piece is a look at the so-called “revolution” that brought about the downfall of Milosevic based on reports from various sources including Yugoslav anarchists.

W.L.

### **Appendix 1:** **LET’S TAKE ANY NAME** (June, 1999)

One of the factors affecting the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia is the future of the economic control of the Balkan region. What remains of the federation created by Tito will be shared within areas directly controlled by different western countries, particularly by Germany in the north and by Italy in the south. If this process is in an advanced phase in Slovenia and Croatia, which have been German fiefs for years, it is still in the embryonic phase for Serbia, Montenegro and Macedonia—lands rich in natural resources and, above all, cheap labor power.

The western masters, small and great, have had their eyes on this region for a long time, but strong social tensions slowed down the affair. The Albanian insurrection of 1997 made them reflect bitterly: in the course of two months, many Italian contractors saw their enterprises razed to the ground and were forced to abandon the country.

Hence, this war is also a tool for protecting future western investments, particularly from the risk of future social upheavals.

Let's take any name of these wandering masters, particularly those from Italy, and we'll discover that behind these bombings, suspicious contractors, powerful financial groups, banks and local corporations are concealed.

Far Italian capital, the door to the Balkans has always been Albania, since the time of the empire. But it is since the beginning of the 1990's that so many contractors from Italy have safely planted themselves beyond the Otranto Channel, and, if we exclude the upheaval of 1997, from this time forward talks of creating an Italian-Albanian *integrated economic area* have been going on.

It was the extremely low cost of labor power that attracted Italian masters to Albania. Albanian wages range from about \$50 to about \$75 a month. Today, according to the Industrialists' Association of Bari (Italy), there are between 600 and 700 Italian companies in Albania, about half of them from the province of Apulia and nearly all of medium-small dimensions. They occupy themselves with transforming raw materials imported from Italy—through highly labor intensive processes—into partly made and finished products that are always then exported back to Italy.

The productive sectors with interests in these investments are those involving textiles, shoe manufacturing, chemicals, citrus fruit products and construction, as well as those involving articles of stone, ceramic and metal.

The Italian businesses have not been left alone in their work of conquest. Above all, after the insurrection of 1997, the European Union made the Italian government provide support for all of them. Two lines of credit were opened for their use by branches of the Cooperation for Development of the Foreign Ministry while the Interregnum Program 2 is occupied with financing the formation of cadres.

The AREF (Albania Reconstruction Equity Fund)—financed by the Italian government through BERS (the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development) and with an additional share, by the Banca Popolare di Bari—underwrites shares of risk capital (up to a maximum of 49%) for the companies that invested in Albania. Besides, in Bari, a secretariat of the *Investment Region* has opened up for the monitoring of the

initiative for cooperation between the two countries. To seal the massive entry of Italian capital into Albania in a definitive manner, for the first time in May, 1998, a performance of the Levantine Fair took place on the other side of the Otranto Channel.

Along with this help in the financial arena, the Italian masters in Albania and their local partners are receiving consistent aid from the Italian government, which is engaged—after the task of reorganizing and arming the forces of order—in collaborating with the Albanians in a concentrated effort to reform the legislative, fiscal and local judiciary systems. In this way, briefly, the final difficulties of administrative, bureaucratic and social order for the Italian enterprises will tend to disappear.

The Kosovar territory is rich with beds of soft coal, lead, zinc, nickel, gold, cadmium and magnesium. Seventy percent of its economy is represented by the Electric Company of Kosovo—which produces most of the electricity used not only in Kosovo, but also in Serbia and Macedonia as well—and by the mining and metallurgical complex of Trepca, the most important in the Yugoslav Federation. Both are still controlled from Serbia which has already launched a plan for privatization. In addition, a substantial portion of other Kosovar businesses is *under the guardianship* of Serbian contractual groups. [*Of course, this has changed with the de facto control of these enterprises now in the hands of the NATO task force, i.e., Western Europe and the US.-translator*]

In the case in which Kosovo were to be granted autonomy—if not independence—who would be considered the proprietor of this inheritance, who would cash in on the profits of privatization? The Rambouillet accords have not cleared this matter up. Just as they have not explained who will get the 416,000 square meters of productive area not exploited by the Development Fund of Serbia.

The businesses of the European Union that want to put their hands on Kosovar resources are not of small dimensions at all, with Italy and ENEL being first in line, aiming at control of the Electric Company of Kosovo. For its part, Peugeot is in negotiation with Zastava of Kragujevac for acquisition of the shock absorber factory in Pristina. Zastava is itself part of FIAT.

The master of the metallurgical sector, however, is to be Miltilineas, a Greek holding which is already using the enormous mining complex in Trepcia. It has trebled the value of its own enterprises in the last year, thanks, above all, to investments in the Balkans, whereas Italy's interests in the mining sector are exclusively in magnesium mines.

Before the outbreak of the war, the Serbian government had intentions of selling the controlling share of Serbian Telecom—the business that controls telecommunications and the postal service. The only candidates for this purchase are the other two shareholders in the company, Italian Telecom and the Greek OTE, which currently own 49% of these shares.

## **Appendix 2:**

### **THE NATIONALIST RACKET**

(June, 1999, slightly revised)

Flight, extermination or resistance: these are the three alternatives for the inhabitants of Kosovo in the face of the advance of the Yugoslav military and the NATO bombing. We are well acquainted with the first two; the images of slaughter and forced exile are there before our eyes again and again as we watch television. From what we can tell from here, the third possibility is currently represented only by the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA). But what price will the exploited have to pay for this new nationalist army?

In times of peace, nationalism is an ideological swindle that steals periods of time from the struggle of the exploited against the exploiters. One way or another, nationalism summons—exploited and exploiters to fight “the common enemy” together.

But when war flares—when it is no longer merely a *threat*—when an army arrives to kill and burn, nationalism ceases to be merely an ideological swindle, it becomes a *practical* racket, hard as a rock. The case of the KLA illustrates the situation well. The exploited, who would have defended themselves against the invaders of today if they were armed, if left to themselves, would be able to attack the masters of tomorrow—the nationalist

leadership. Again as before, however, the rage against the Serb invasion is easily directed into the ranks of the Liberation Army and controlled from there. Let's not forget that the KLA, along with the Yugoslav army, has the *monopoly of arms*; and without arms, there is no way for one to defend oneself. So for most Kosovars who want to resist the plans of Milosevic the choice becomes compulsory: either join the KLA or be disarmed.

The elder nationalists of Liberation Army, thus have the troops that they have always lacked at their disposal and now face the possibility of becoming the Kosovar leadership in the future, undermining their ancient rival Rugova.

The roots of the KLA sink into the fertile terrain of the revolts and repressions that have marked Kosovo for the past eighteen years. Founded in 1992, the KLA is the offspring of several maoist and marxist-leninist groups that had been struggling for the unification of Kosovo to Enver Hoxha's Albania ever since the beginning of the 1980's.

It was only in 1996, however, that this organization began to make itself known and became a serious competitor of Rugova, the unquestioned leader of the opposition to the Serbs. Armed and trained in Germany—the historic competitor of Serbia in the Balkans—the KLA began to structure itself as a true and proper army, carried out attacks against camps of Serbian refugees in Krajina and won the backing of Albanian president Berisha. From this time on, the marxist-leninist element tends increasingly to disappear, giving way exclusively to the nationalist element: the declared aim is the creation of the great Albania—the union of the current Albania with Kosovo, the southern portion of Montenegro and the western half of Macedonia. It was not mere chance then that when Albanian nationalists would finally get control, in 1998, of a third of Kosovo, they would persecute the Serbian, gypsy and mixed minorities in the “liberated territories”.

Starting in 1996, the KLA chose to ask for aid from the clans of Kosovo and Albania, which control the Albanian diaspora almost completely. It is in light of this solid alliance that we should interpret the calls to mobilization made by the KLA during those months: they were orders of compulsory conscription, just as the “revolutionary tax” it demanded of



emigrants was obligatory. Embryo of a potential Kosovar government, the political committee *made the decisions*. The clans, the police of the future, were to carry them out.

Here, then, is the price the KLA may still make the exploited Kosovars pay: the creation of a new state, the next dominating power, when the occupation ends.

*[Editor's note: Since this was written, the "humanitarian bombing" has been replaced by a "humanitarian peacekeeping force" consisting of NATO and UN troops. This occupation of Kosovo by western European and American military forces is justified by the continuation of ethnic violence. It is doubtful that the Western powers would care about this if they didn't have economic interests in the area, but since they do, they need to maintain some level of stability in the area. The Serbian-Kosovar conflict gave them the opportunity to establish a strong military presence there to protect their interests. The prediction in the above article of the creation of a Kosovar state looks distant at the moment. Instead the continuation of the current military occupation of the area seems likely to continue for a while. Humanitarianism and "peacekeeping" will probably be the ongoing face of Western political and economic domination of the world.]*

### **Appendix 3: ON YUGOSLAVIA'S LATEST "REVOLUTION": The fall of Milosevic**

The various analyses of the late September/early October 2000 "revolution" in Yugoslavia that I have come across in anarchist sources have ranged from cries of jubilation (these posted at the time of the events) to Tom Wheeler's thorough discrediting of the events ("Revolution in Yugoslavia—who won?", *ANARCHY: A Journal of Desire Armed* #50/fall-winter 2000-2001). The jubilation has thoroughly vanished as events unfolded as could have been predicted. Nonetheless, I feel that Wheeler's approach (though important as a critical analysis and

one of the sources of information for this appendix) tends to leave out parts of the reality of the events and the background behind the Yugoslav anarchists' hopes at the time that this might go further than a mere changing of the guards.

The storming and burning of the Parliament building in Belgrade was certainly a bit too perfect. The (not merely verbal) support of the US government for this "revolution" is a good indication that there were forces in play besides the wrath of the Yugoslav people. Still people in revolt—even when it is thoroughly orchestrated—do sometimes cut the strings and turn on the puppet-masters. Did anarchists in Serbia have reason to think this might happen in this instance?

The Balkans do not comprise such a large region. Albania borders on Montenegro and Kosovo—thus on what little is left of the Yugoslav federation. Only a few years ago, in 1997, there was an uprising in Albania that managed, in the course of a few months, to largely bring the functioning of the state apparatus and capital to a halt.<sup>1</sup> This revolt was provoked by the failure of a hyper-capitalist pyramid scheme that the Albanian government had convinced the people to invest in. The pyramid scheme went bankrupt and left a large portion of the populace with neither land nor money. In spite of attempts by political groups to usurp this movement, it remained largely autonomous and self-organized, moved quickly from making demands to taking direct action including the ransacking and dismantling of banks, raids on military armories (frequently aided by the mostly conscripted soldiers), the dismantling of prisons and release of the prisoners, attacks on police and so on. Of course, in time, the revolt was bound to spend its energy or be recuperated into one or another of the nationalist ideologies through which the Albanian state has tended to maintain control unless it spread beyond its borders and achieve an awareness of the possibilities it manifested, but due to Italy's economic interests in the region, it intervened with the help of its NATO allies in an armed "humanitarian mission" to restore order before these eventualities arose and "order"—

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<sup>1</sup> A description and anarchist analysis of this uprising can be found in the pamphlet, *Albania, Laboratory of Subversion* (Elephant Editions, London, 1999).

i.e., a functioning state and capitalist relations—has been restored

I bring this up because this is part of the recent regional history that Yugoslav anarchists probably took into consideration in deciding how to respond to the movement for the removal of Milosevic. The Albanian uprising had not originated with a consciously anti-capitalist or anti-state agenda. It is doubtful that any uprising ever has. It is for this reason that anarchists do not determine their participation in a struggle in terms of the totality of its vision (we'd never participate in anything if we did), but rather in terms of the possibilities for intervening in the struggle in a way that encourages self-organization, direct action and insurrection. It is through such a practice that people can come to envision a world without hierarchy or authority. Thus, considering the origin and trajectory of the Albanian revolt, it should be no surprise that Yugoslav anarchists would see possibilities in the much more politically conscious revolt against Milosevic and would choose to try participate.

Nonetheless, the puppet-masters in this case had started the show with a clear intent and included the most powerful forces in the world (whereas in Albania, the would-be puppet-masters went running after the people in revolt, seeking to place their strings on them after the fact). As "A War Nearby" makes clear, Western powers, through the IMF and the World Bank, began manipulating ethnic differences in Yugoslavia well before the fall of the various so-called "communist" regimes. Milosevic, with his Serbian nationalist rhetoric, was meant to be one of the puppets in their schemes. But this puppet (like Manuel Noriega, Saddam Hussein and so many others) wanted his own show and so, ultimately, proved to be a detriment to the needs of the West. After the NATO/UN occupation of Kosovo, the time was ripe for the fall of Milosevic. Opposition forces were strong and Milosevic was in a precarious position. In the national election Vojislav Kostunica apparently won, but Milosevic was not ready to give up power and the Federal Election Commission (controlled, according to the opposition, by Milosevic and his cohorts) called for a recount. This is when the Democratic Opposition of Serbia (DOS) called for "total protest and total resistance, a total boycott, a peaceful general strike".

It is often easier to see the larger picture of a particular situation from a distance, to see the levels of orchestration and choreography going on in an apparently spontaneous situation. Nonetheless, Yugoslav anarchists were quite aware of the nature of the DOS, the Alliance for Change and similar groups. Such groups have been contenders for power in the region for years, and as such can be nothing other than puppets for Western interests. The question that arises is whether all of those who participated in the protests at that time were also merely unconscious puppets, or were some actually acting in terms of their own autonomous project of revolt. This is something we may never know since it is only the major events that we tend to hear about.

The DOS, the Alliance for Change and most other organized, official opposition groups have been working quite openly with Western powers. After all, the official propaganda of the region has been promoting the idea of the horrors of the communist past and the freedom to be found in adapting a Western-style “free market” economy for years. Neither the West nor the official opposition has ever had any real interest in ending ethnic conflict regardless of rhetoric to the contrary. Their only interest is to provide enough stability to allow the Western economic powers to carry their enterprises forward with relative ease. Milosevic and his policies did not provide this stability. Thus the same powers that carried out “humanitarian bombing” and now occupy Kosovo in supposed opposition to “ethnic cleansing” had no problem funding an opposition group that included former members of paramilitary groups that were involved in the alleged “ethnic cleansing” in Bosnia and Croatia.<sup>2</sup> A real end to the ethnic conflict in the region would not serve the capitalist interests in the region, because it is one of the most useful tools for controlling the exploited and marginalized classes. “A War Nearby” describes the ways in which the rulers in the area used ethnic differences to suppress revolt, and unrest continues to simmer in the region. As those who rule us well know, the chaos of ethnic conflict is easier to control than that of class conflict,

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<sup>2</sup> “Revolution in Yugoslavia—who won?”, *ANARCHY: A Journal of Desire Armed*, #50, goes into more detail on this.

because the former is not an actual challenge to domination. So the West is glad to support an opposition that merely wants...to be Western, that is to say good capitalist democrats.

But there is another opposition group that was involved in this so-called “revolution”. The group, *Otpor* (Resistance)<sup>3</sup>, has been praised in some parts of the anarchist press in Western Europe and the US. *Otpor* appears to be leaderless and to lack a formal membership. It was founded in 1998 and made up mostly of students. But, according to certain anarchists in Yugoslavia, this is not an accurate picture of the group. It apparently does have a leadership that rests in the Council of *Otpor* that consists of university professors and members of the Academy of Arts and Sciences. The members of this academy played a major role in the mid to late 1980’s in developing the ideological basis of Serbian cultural nationalism which was to become one of the foundations of Milosevic’s political campaign. Unlike DOS and other official oppositional groups, it is difficult to trace the financial source by which *Otpor* is funded, but it is clearly well-funded with resources that cannot be explained in terms of its predominately academic membership. For this reason, anarchists in Yugoslavia suspect that it too is well funded by Western powers.

So it is clear that the official opposition that called for the “revolution” in late September, 2000 in Yugoslavia were acting in the interests of their Western puppet-masters. Their activity was well funded and well choreographed by forces outside Serbia and arguably the result was a foregone conclusion. It doesn’t require a complex analysis to recognize that Kostunica is a puppet and that those who pull the strings have their armed forces “keeping the peace” in his back yard—not leaving much room for him to deviate from their designs. Ethnic conflict continues to burn hot enough in Kosovo to justify the continued NATO/UN occupation. Certainly, it appears from here that the main change accomplished with the fall of Milosevic has been a

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<sup>3</sup> More detailed information about *Otpor* can be found in the article, “Interpreting Balkan Fairytales: ‘Serbia’s October Revolution’” by Brian Bamford, posted on A-Infos as “Anarchist movements in Serbia” posted by Chris Robinson on February 25, 2001.

more thorough control of the Balkans by Western interests—not just the US, but the EU as well, particularly Germany and Italy.

But things are often very clear with hindsight from a distance. With an awareness of the history of class conflict in Yugoslavia, particularly against the austerity measures the government tried to put into effect in the 1980's in order to get IMF loans, and also of the 1997 uprising in Albania, it should be clear why Yugoslav anarchists—even though most probably aware of the orchestration of events—might choose to join people in struggle. DOS, the Alliance for Change, *Otpor* and their like were clearly just political gangs vying for positions in the new arrangements of power that were in the works. But when people start to struggle, as I said above, they sometimes cut the strings and the puppet-masters lose their control. Unfortunately, I have seen nothing actually describing how the anarchists participated in the events that drove Milosevic from power. Were they just a tail being wagged by the loyal opposition for their masters, or did they come with their own clear revolutionary anarchist project? For now, we know the state and capital still reign in Yugoslavia and all the misery imposed by this reign continue. The names have changed. The faces have changed. But domination and exploitation continue, with a more clearly Western face.

## RECOMMENDED READING

*Albania, Laboratory of Subversion*, an anonymous pamphlet from Elephant Editions (1999)

“Albania: the Proletariat Confronts the Bourgeois State”, *Communism* #11, journal of the International Communist Group (1999)

“Capitalism at the Crossroads and the Opportunity of the Yugoslav Crisis”, *Killing King Abacus* #1 (2000)

*Yugoslavery—Yugoslavia: Capitalism and Class Struggle 1918-1967; Some Basic Ingredients of Yugoslav Ideology*, pamphlet from BM Blob (winter, 1991)

“Yugoslavia: from Wage Cuts to War”, *Wildcat* #18 (summer 1996)

“Yugoslavia Unraveled”, *Aufheben* #2 (summer 1993)

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**818 SW 3<sup>rd</sup> Ave., PMB 1237**  
**Portland, OR 97204**  
**USA**